



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – World Water Day

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**Ambassador Bleich's Remarks for  
The Launch of US/AUS-H2O: The U.S./Australia Virtual  
Environmental Partnership  
Lyneham High School**

*(As delivered – March 22, 2013)*

Thank you, Minister Garrett. Your success in making this day happen confirms that you really are a rock star Minister. And not just because you used to be a rock star. Only 18 months, you and our Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced this project during President Obama's visit to Canberra. And today this online partnership is a reality.

Thanks to our hosts, Principal Colleen Matheson, teachers Thiona Moss and Janet Richardson, and of course these fantastic students. On behalf of President Obama, it is a real privilege to be here and to tell you in person, in the presence of Minister Garrett, that Lyneham High School rocks.

Finally, congratulations to our extraordinary project coordinators: Judy O'Neill from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, and Australian project lead Professor Andrew Campbell, from Charles Darwin University. This wouldn't have been possible without you.

This initiative matters a lot. By the time the students in this room are my age, we will have added 2.5 billion people to the middle class in this region. People who will need water for everything they do, but particularly to feed themselves and their children. That is an awesome challenge, and it can be accomplished only by starting early, and working together. This U.S.-Australia Virtual Environmental Partnership helps us do just that. It promotes science education and awareness of the environment across a vast ocean, linking teams of students in Australia and the United States who ultimately will need to solve this challenge together. I know that the students at Brunswick County Early College High School, in Bolivia, NC, and the students here at Lyneham will learn a lot from each other.

At my Embassy, there is no higher priority than finding ways to ensure that there is enough food, water, and energy in this region to allow every nation to rise, and to avoid conflict and human suffering. And that starts at home. Our Embassy here is the greenest in Australia – actually the greenest U.S. Mission in the developed world -- with green buildings, recycling, water catchments, and all of those things. We use solar panels in our residences, we recently added an electric vehicle – a Chevy Volt – to our vehicle



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fleet, and just last week my staff and I went out to clean-up the North Watson Wetlands to celebrate World Wetlands Day. So we practice what we preach.

But acting locally is only part of it. We need to cooperate across nations and change attitudes internationally about water. One of the biggest challenges you all will have in your lifetimes will be changing how people around the world think about water. In the U.S., water costs about \$1.50 for every 1,000 gallons. When we think of it, which is rare, we think of it like air – unlimited, virtually free, and available at the turn of a tap. However, this is not the case.

By 2025, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will be living under water-stressed conditions, including roughly two billion people who will face absolute water scarcity. Water scarcity and poor water quality increase disease, undermine economic growth, limit food production, and become an increasing threat to peace and security.

Most of the great water supplies serve more than one country, and so scarcity can create conflicts among nations as well as within nations. Over 40% of the world's population lives in 260 river basins that are shared between two or more countries. When there are water shortages, or the quality of the water decreases, regional tensions increase in response. We have seen this in the United States where there are long-running fights between states over water usage as the populations increase. Luckily for us, these disagreements are settled through the courts. In other places, that might not be the case.

At the same time, climate change will have a profound impact. It will affect how much water is available, how it is distributed, and the quality of your water. Some islands in the Pacific are already losing their water supplies as oceans rise and destroy their fresh water tables. Floods, droughts, and other extreme weather events are projected to become more frequent and severe in some regions, which will further challenge our ability to manage resources.

That's why we have to work together now to share scientific knowledge and promote healthy ecosystems.

Just as water can be a cause for conflict, it can also be a tool for promoting peace. If we are going to make sure that we have enough water for the future, we're going to have to work together and change our habits. We need to look for ways to expand production, to recycle water, and to develop effective conservation strategies. Today is a leap forward not only for our virtual world, but for our physical world, and I want to thank all of you for your commitment to its success.